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DE RUEHKO #1757/01 0930224  
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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
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RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 5466  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 8624  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1475  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0951  
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION JAPANESE POLITICS/SINO-JAPANESE  
RELATIONS - TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Most Monday morning papers front-paged growing speculation that the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) deputy leader Ichiro Ozawa or former leader Naoto Kan will succeed outgoing chief Maehara.

11. "Maehara's Decision Comes Too Late" The top-circulation, moderate Yomiuri editorialized (4/1): "DPJ President Maehara's decision to step down marks a bitter end to the confusion arising from the phony email scandal. On Friday, Maehara and the rest of the party leadership resigned to take responsibility for the turmoil. Hisayasu Nagata, who raised the email in the Diet, has resigned from the Lower House. These steps apparently reflect the embattled main opposition party's desire to turn things around as it prepares for the latter half of the Diet session and a by-election in Chiba Prefecture's seventh constituency.... Maehara's decision came too late. The fact that it took him six weeks to settle the problem can be blamed on his inability to properly deal with the crisis facing his party.

12. "The DPJ had been flooded with protests, with some people saying that they could no longer trust the party. The DPJ needs to be aware that regaining this lost trust will not be an easy matter.... The chaos created by the DPJ has delayed deliberations in the Diet, a development that has increased distrust in politicians and political parties overall. In addition, it will now be more difficult for the DPJ to take power from the ruling coalition. According a recent Yomiuri poll, more than 70 percent of respondents said that the DPJ is not fit to run the country. The DPJ will likely choose Maehara's successor Friday at a general meeting of party lawmakers

from both Houses of the Diet.... The DPJ is composed of an eclectic mix of legislators who previously belonged to other parties, including the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the left-leaning Social Democratic Party.... There are major fissures among DPJ members over such issues as foreign relations, national security, and other basic policies."

13. "How Will Potential Prime Ministers React to Chinese President's Remarks?" An editorial in the liberal Mainichi commented (4/3): "During a meeting in Beijing with senior officials of pro-China Japanese organizations, Chinese President Hu Jintao said that he was 'ready to hold talks with any Japanese leader who promises to never again visit Yasukuni Shrine, which enshrines the souls of Class-A war criminals.'... This is the first time for a Chinese leader to directly link visits to Yasukuni and summit meetings, demonstrating again China's unyielding stance on the matter.... Bilateral relations remain chilly, as neither country's leader has visited the other nation in more than four-and-a-half years...."

14. "With such issues in the background as China's development of natural gas fields in the East China Sea and the suicide of a Japanese communications officer at the Shanghai Consulate General, some have said that bilateral relations are at their lowest point since the two countries normalized ties in 1972.... It appears that Beijing has given up on improving relations with Japan while PM Koizumi is in office.... With the enactment of the fiscal 2006 state budget, moves are already afoot behind the scenes to select a successor to PM Koizumi,

TOKYO 00001757 002 OF 002

who is scheduled to step down as LDP president in September. It is fair to say that President Hu had Japan's domestic political situation in mind when he met with officials of the pro-China Japanese organizations. His remarks were directed not so much at Koizumi as at those who would seek to succeed him."

DONOVAN